

Soviets Inform Lithuanians Of Cuts in Oil, Natural Gas

By Michael Dobbs
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, April 17—The government of the breakaway Soviet republic of Lithuania said today that the Kremlin had signaled the start of a partial economic blockade by ordering sharp cuts in oil and natural gas supplies.

Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene told a televised news conference that she had been unofficially informed that Soviet oil supplies to the republic's main oil refinery would be cut off on Wednesday. Officials of a Soviet natural gas network earlier sent a telegram to the Lithuanian gas company giving notice of an imminent reduction in supplies on the instructions of the Soviet government.

A 48-hour deadline set by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev for Lithuania to reverse its drive toward independent statehood expired Sunday evening. The Soviet leader had threatened to suspend deliveries of commodities that can be sold abroad for freely convertible currency if Lithuania failed to cancel a series of legislative actions designed to strengthen its independence from the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev appears torn between conflicting sets of advice over how to resolve the Lithuanian problem. Conservatives in the Communist Party, supported by a large segment of the military establishment, would like him to declare direct



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis addresses legislators in Vilnius.

presidential rule in the breakaway republic, suspending the Lithuanian parliament. But other advisers, such as Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, have warned that such a step could jeopardize the Soviet leader's international standing.

At a Foreign Ministry news briefing here today, Shevardnadze said there were "certain problems" over last Friday's ultimatum to Lithuania and the "tough deadlines" set by the president. He told reporters that he fears the Lithuanian crisis could damage Soviet-U.S. relations despite what he described as the "rea-

sonable" stance adopted by the Bush administration.

"I have the impression the Americans want no complications in Lithuania. On the other hand, their actions follow a certain logic. The United States didn't recognize Lithuania's entry into the Soviet Union and it has a big Lithuanian community," Shevardnadze said.

Lithuania, which proclaimed the restoration of its prewar independence on March 11, depends on the rest of the Soviet Union for 97 percent of its energy supplies. But Lithuanian officials claim that they have sufficient reserves of natural

See LITHUANIA, A30, Col. 1

■ **Bush says U.S. will react to Soviet gas cutoff in Lithuania.** Page A30

Lithuanians Told of Cuts In Gas, Oil

LITHUANIA, From A1

gas for at least two weeks and supplies of oil for at least six weeks.

"This is the real beginning of freedom," Prunskiene told the news conference in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius. Lithuanian leaders have argued that by reducing supplies of subsidized oil and gas, the Kremlin is, in effect, treating Lithuania as a foreign country.

The Lithuanian government had not received any official word from Moscow on the details of the planned cuts. The first word came in a telegram from the headquarters of the Soviet Union's western gas network that was read out in the Lithuanian legislature this morning.

The telegram said: "Vilnius: To Vistinis, General Director of Lithuanian Gas: Implementing the orders of the government of the USSR and those of the state gas concern No 81d of 16.04.90, supplies of natural gas to the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic will be sharply reduced from April 17 of the current year."

Lithuania uses natural gas from the Soviet Union, which is piped in from Byelorussia along the so-called Friendship pipeline, largely for its chemical industry and for domestic heating. The onset of warm, spring weather means that the immediate inconvenience to ordinary Lithuanians will not be nearly as great as if the reduction had come in winter.

Lithuanian officials maintain that it will be very difficult for the Kremlin to mount an effective economic blockade against Lithuania without hurting the rest of the Soviet economy. They note, for example, that the Friendship pipeline also supplies a Russian-administered enclave around the city of Kaliningrad that is sandwiched between Lithuania and Poland.

Lithuanian Energy Minister Leonas Asmantas told reporters tonight that economic sanctions are likely to hurt the Soviet Union as much as Lithuania. He cited the case of the oil refinery at Mazeikiai, saying that only a quarter of its output of 84 million barrels is consumed in Lithuania itself. The rest is either exported or sent to other Soviet republics.

Lithuania is hoping for economic support from the neighboring Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia, where secessionist sentiment is also strong. An Estonian deputy in the federal parliament, Igor Griazin, told reporters today that Estonia should share some of its own imported energy products and raw materials with Lithuania.

In a conciliatory gesture toward Moscow, the Lithuanian parliament today discussed the possibility of declaring a temporary halt to the passage of new legislation on creating an independent state. But the action falls far short of the Kremlin's demands for a return to the pre-March 11 status quo.

Western concerns over a possible Kremlin crackdown in Lithuania were conveyed to Gorbachev and Shevardnadze today by Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis.



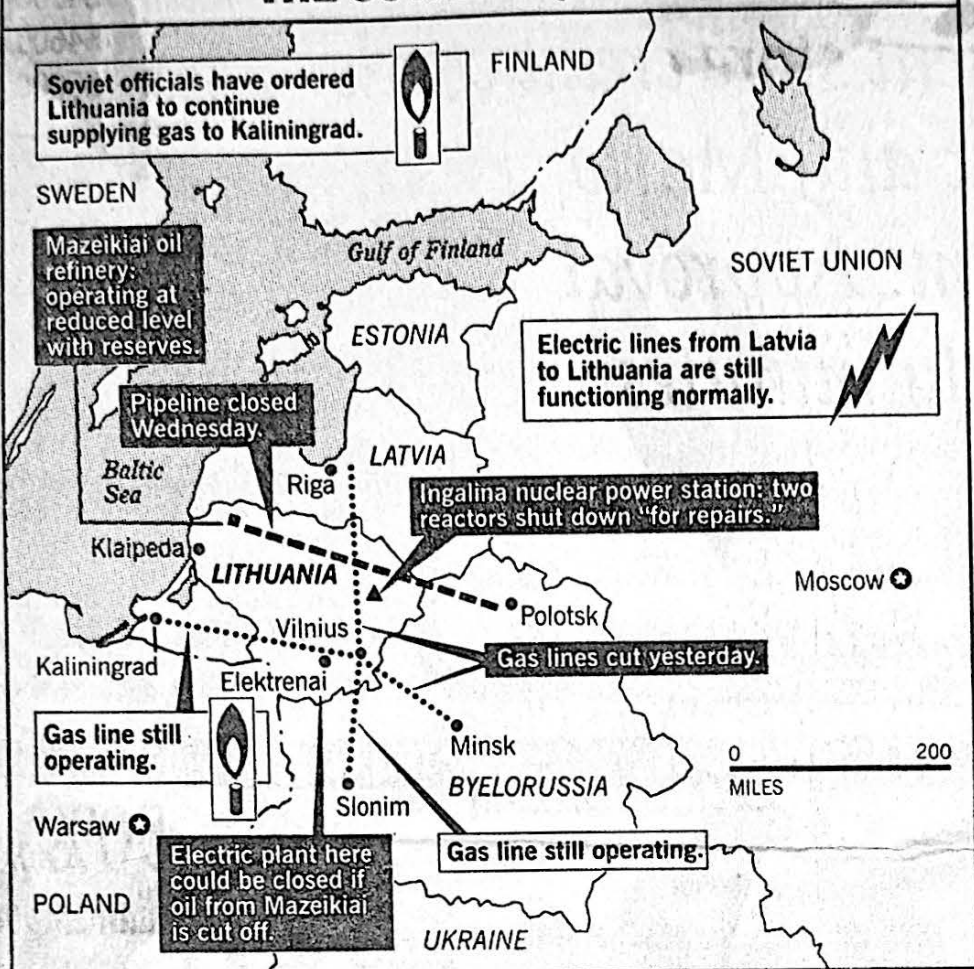
THE WASHINGTON POST

In an interview later, however, De Michelis expressed sympathy for the Kremlin's predicament over Lithuania and criticized attempts by Congress to pressure the Bush administration into reacting prematurely.

"There are too many ethnic lobbies in the United States," said De Michelis, adding that the Kremlin has "very narrow" room to maneuver. "If Gorbachev accepts unilateral proclamations [of independence] by Lithuania, there is a real danger that the Soviet Union will disintegrate."

The Soviet authorities have barred foreign journalists and diplomats from traveling to Lithuania since the end of March. But the Foreign Ministry today invited a small group of Western correspondents on an escorted tour to the republic this weekend.

THE SOVIET SQUEEZE



BY MICHAEL DREW—THE WASHINGTON POST

Today Gorbachev offered the leaders of both Estonia and Latvia political and economic independence within a new Soviet federation, provided that they suspend their unilateral actions. On March 30, the Estonian parliament proclaimed a transitional period toward independence and the Latvian parliament is meeting on May 3 to consider a similar measure.

Soviet troops staged previously unannounced maneuvers today about 20 miles east of the Estonian capital, Tallinn. Andres Raid, a reporter for Estonian television, said he had counted about 15 armored personnel carriers, 15 rocket launchers and 15 artillery pieces. He quoted a Soviet officer as saying that the maneuvers were connected with celebrations scheduled for May 9 to mark the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.

The Kremlin used shows of military force as tactic of intimidation against Lithuania in the weeks immediately following its March 11 declaration of independence. Soviet

troops also occupied a number of public buildings in Vilnius, including the republic's Communist Party headquarters and the offices of the Lithuanian public prosecutor.

Tonight's Soviet government statement, distributed by the official Tass news agency, said that Vilnius had failed to rescind a series of "illegal acts," including the issuing of Lithuanian identity cards and a refusal to cooperate with the Soviet army's annual conscription campaign. Last Friday, Gorbachev gave Lithuanian leaders 48 hours to comply with his demands or face a cutoff in supplies of vital raw materials.

The Soviet oil ministry announced tonight that the Mazeikiai oil refinery has reserve stocks of no more than 500,000 barrels. It predicted that the refinery would be forced to close down completely within four or five days, even if it works at reduced capacity.

Only half of the output of the Mazeikiai refinery is consumed in Lithuania, with the rest earmarked either for export or for neighboring

republics. Soviet officials insisted that neighboring regions would not be hurt by the oil cutoff as Lithuania's supplies would now go to refineries in Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine which have excess capacity.

Lithuanian officials said that the flow of natural gas was interrupted this morning through two pipelines from Byelorussia and Latvia. They said gas was still flowing through a third pipeline from the Byelorussian town of Slonim which, however, only provides 124 million cubic feet of Lithuania's total daily consumption of 632 million cubic feet.

Soviet gas officials instructed Lithuania to continue supplying 21.2 million cubic feet of gas a day to the city of Kaliningrad in a Russian-administered enclave wedged between Lithuania and Poland. But the Lithuanian government ordered a moratorium today on energy exports and it was not immediately clear whether it would comply with this order.

Electricity supplies to Lithuania from the Soviet power grid have not yet been cut. But Lithuania's own power plant at Elektrėnai, near Vilnius, could be closed down within a week because of the cutback in oil and gas deliveries.

Asmantas said the amount of natural gas used for the production of electrical energy and artificial nitrates would be slashed by more than 85 percent. But he assured Lithuanians that they would still have sufficient gas for cooking.

The energy minister said that supplies of gasoline would last for several weeks with restricted consumption. Starting Friday, owners of private automobiles will be limited to about 8 gallons a month.

Staff writer Hoffman added from Key Largo:

President Bush expressed renewed concern over Soviet pressure on Lithuania.

"No, I can't tell you when the United States might do something," Bush said. "But my reluctance stems from trying to keep open a dialogue and discussion that affects many, many countries. And I'm talking about arms control. I'm talking about solidifying the democracies in Eastern Europe. I'm talking about a lot of matters where U.S.-Soviet relations affect a lot of other countries."